

The Stamp Act

Background

For nearly 150 years, the only national taxes placed on the English colonies were import duties. However, after the Seven Years War, England's national government was left with a huge debt. A bill was introduced in Parliament to tax the colonies to help pay that debt. The Stamp Tax would require colonists to purchase from the national government a stamp for all official documents, licenses and newspapers. When the members of the Virginia House of Burgesses learned about the Stamp Act, they discussed a Resolution opposing it.

The Stamp Act is Fair By "Lord South," speaking before England's Parliament

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the proposed Stamp Act. Ever since Englishmen planted these colonies in the New World, Parliament has not taxed them, except for meager duties on imports and exports. Yet, at great expense, England has defended the colonies.

For example, we built the world's most powerful fleet, which protects American trading ships. The Virginia tobacco planter, the Massachusetts fisherman and the Pennsylvania bread-maker all owe their profits to the English navy. However, the tariffs they pay do not come close to covering its expense.

And what of our recent war with France? The French were giving guns to the Shawnee and encouraging them to raid American frontier settlements. Our expensive victory ended the Indian threat, because we forced France to give us their possessions in Canada.

In fact, in order to make peace with France two years ago, we agreed to give back several islands we had captured in the Caribbean. These islands and their valuable sugar plantations were worth much more to England than Canada. But we gave the islands back to achieve a peace that provided more security to the American colonies. We could have agreed to give Canada back instead, but we did not.

The war was so expensive; our government is now £100 million in debt. The Stamp Act is a fair way to ensure that Americans pay a small part of the cost of a war that helped them so much. People who live in England already pay 30 times more in taxes than Americans. Even with the Stamp Act, the Americans will still pay less than Englishmen pay.

Some Americans claim they should not be taxed because they cannot elect representatives to Parliament. But, that is a strange position for Americans to take. For they only allow property owners to vote for representatives to their colonial legislatures. Yet, they impose many taxes on everyone, including those who do not own property. What hypocrites. The fact is, they recognize that those who cannot vote can still influence those who can. Since virtually every colonial merchant and legislature has an agent in London, it is clear that Americans are able to influence the votes of their English cousins.

Besides, the Americans are far outnumbered by Englishmen living in England. Even if they had representation in Parliament they would be outvoted all the time.

The Americans should stop making excuses for not paying their fair share of taxes. The Stamp Act is just and long overdue.

The Stamp Act is Unfair
By “Henry Patrick,” speaking before Virginia’s House of Burgesses

Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer a Resolution expressing our opposition to the Stamp Act. It is true that for 150 years, Parliament has not taxed us, other than import and export duties. But, this policy has been pursued because past English governments recognized that it would be wrong for them to tax us. Americans are not allowed to elect representatives to the English Parliament so Americans should not be taxed by Parliament.

I am not suggesting that a government can only tax those who are allowed to vote. In Virginia, only people who own property can vote, yet some taxes must be paid by all. That is fair because those who cannot vote can still influence those who can, for they are neighbors and friends. But, how can we influence those who vote for Parliament, when we live thousands of miles away from them?

It is observed that Englishmen pay more in taxes than we do. The fact that we are not taxed by Parliament, however, does not mean that we do not pay taxes. We pay our own colonial taxes. Do people in England pay Virginia’s taxes for Virginia’s roads and militia? We also obey the Navigation Acts. Requiring us to export our

most valuable products, such as tobacco and rice, only to England benefits English merchants, who take a cut of our profits, and the English government that gets to charge us a tariff. The Navigation Acts also require us to import European products through England. We pay more for those products, while English merchants and the English government make money.

We are told we should help pay for England’s navy because it protects us. However, if it weren’t for our association with England, we would not need protection. Our merchant ships are targets of European nations because of their conflicts with England, not with us.

It is true that we benefited from our recent war with France. But it is also true that we paid for it. American militia also fought in that war and those soldiers were paid by colonial taxpayers.

Until Parliament allows us to elect some of its members, Parliament should not tax us, but instead, should allow us to tax ourselves as we have done for 150 years.

Name _____ Date _____

The Stamp Act Worksheet

- 1) According to Lord South, what did England agree to give up to achieve a peace treaty that gave security to the Americans? _____
- 2) According to Lord South, Englishmen in England pay how much more in taxes than Americans? _____
- 3) According to Mr. Patrick, for how long has England not taxed the Americans? _____
- 4) According to Mr. Patrick, why has England not taxed the American colonies, other than import and export duties? _____

- 5) Compare and contrast the views of Lord South and Mr. Patrick on the fact that only property owners can vote in the American colonies. _____

- 6) Compare and contrast the views of Lord South and Mr. Patrick on the fact that Englishmen in England pay more in taxes than Americans. _____

(Over please)

- 7) Which person do you agree with and what is their most persuasive example or statistic?

- 8) If you had to find a compromise between the two, what would it be and describe what each side would have to give up in your compromise?
